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SUBJECT: HEZB-E-ISLAMI AFGHANISTAN PARTY CHAIR ON CARETAKER
GOVERNMENT

¶1. (SBU) Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) Chairman Arghandewal on 2/22 told PolCouns his party would not make a "big deal" of the post-5/22 period following the constitutional expiration of President Karzai's term, even though most party members want Karzai to resign if he intends to run for re-election. HIA's executive committee supported the 8/20 election date, but had not yet decided on a favored candidate. Arghandewal held out the option of supporting Karzai if the president offered HIA a vice president slot, but was generally downbeat on the government's performance over the past several years.

¶2. (SBU) Arghandewal recently joined talks led by Pir Gailani aimed at resolving disagreements among Afghan political leaders regarding post-5/22 executive authority. Based on his attendance at two meetings, Arghandewal felt some participants were not seriously committed to finding a consensus and were playing the Palace and the opposition for their own benefit. HIA's preferred solution would be for Karzai not to seek re-election, in which case it would have no objection if he remained in office until the inauguration.

If Karzai wished to run, HIA would call for an interim government headed by Upper House Speaker Mojaddedi. In such a scenario, HIA would call on Mojaddedi to replace some of Karzai's strongest supporters in the Cabinet, to prevent what HIA feared would be official efforts to influence the election outcome. Arghandewal admitted these positions showed HIA was more concerned with Karzai's interference in the election than with following a literal interpretation of the Constitution.

¶3. (SBU) PolCouns outlined the U.S. position: resolution of the executive authority issue required Afghan political leaders (including Karzai and key opposition leaders) to work together to find an agreed-to political solution. The United States would advocate no specific outcome, but would insist the eventual solution preserve the 8/20 election, maintain a strong government during the peak fighting season, and support the authority and goals of the Constitution.

¶4. (SBU) Arghandewal looked forward to closer cooperation with the new U.S. administration. HIA and the U.S. shared common interests, such as promoting good governance and opposing negative Russian and Iranian influence in Afghan affairs. However, Arghandewal's pro-U.S. stance and moderate positions on many issues may still be out of line with his party's grassroots membership, as he demurred when asked if HIA would publicly support increased U.S. troop deployments. HIA members were more interested in supporting U.S. positions on non-military solutions to Afghanistan's problems, he said.
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